



Healthy Worksite • Healthy Workforce • Healthy Communities

Fighting Obesity in the Workplace

During the past 30 years, there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. Obesity rates are high. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in every three American adults is now considered obese, which is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher, and approximately another 40 percent are overweight. That's contributing significantly to diabetes, heart disease, stroke and certain kinds of cancer.

There are a variety of factors that play a role in obesity, which is an excess of body fat that results from an energy imbalance. That imbalance is created by taking in more calories than is burned off through metabolism and physical activity. Behavior, environment, socioeconomic status and genetics may have an effect on obesity, making it a complex health issue to address. The CDC notes that the rise in the obesity rate has implications for the overall health of Americans and the U.S. health care system, with their burden on the country's medical resources and their financial direct and indirect costs estimated at about \$147 billion a year and rising.

Americans spend a significant part of our lives in the workplace, making it a valuable place to engrain and encourage healthy behaviors. Struggling to change behaviors to maintain a healthy weight is not easy, but weight management supported by worksite wellness programs is good for employers and employees alike.

Opportunity in the workplace

The good news is that there is hope for bringing the obesity epidemic under control by tackling the problem in the workplace, where 139 million Americans spend about a third of their time on any given day. With their workers spending an average of 40 hours a week on the job, employers have a unique opportunity to help create a healthier workforce by fostering a health-conscious work environment and providing convenient opportunities for their employees to eat better, be more physically active and take better care of themselves overall. And employers have several incentives to do so.

-more-

The literature indicates that maintaining a healthy workforce can lower direct costs, such as insurance premiums and worker's compensation claims, as well as indirect costs like employee productivity, absenteeism and "presenteeism," that is, when employees come to work suffering from physical or mental health problems that prevent them from working at their full potential.

The National Healthy Worksite Program

A new CDC initiative, the National Healthy Worksite Program, is making it much easier for about 115 small, medium and large-sized employers across the country to adopt workplace health improvement programs that can address obesity and excess weight, and other related chronic conditions. The program's lessons can be applied in broader employer communities across the nation. The NHWP



includes assessment of employees' needs, the development of evidence-based health-related plans that give workers opportunities for professional health coaching, weight management and physical activity through changes in the work environment. It also may include time within the work day for employees to engage in physical activity, such as structured exercise, or walking to aid in weight loss. The plan may also include providing employees with nutritional and caloric information about the food available in workplace cafeterias and vending machines, and access to

nearby farmers' or garden markets. Some specific physical activity opportunities can include stairwell enhancements, physical fitness or lifestyle counseling, walking trails and/or clubs.

Some other things employers can do under the NHWP are:

- Provide free or subsidized body composition measurements, such as height and weight, Body Mass Index (BMI) scores, or other body fat assessments, followed by direct feedback and clinical referral when appropriate
- Provide a series of educational seminars, workshops or classes on weight management.
- Provide free or subsidized one-on-one or group lifestyle counseling for employees who are overweight or obese.
- Provide free or subsidized self-management programs for weight management.
- Provide cafeterias and vending with healthy food and beverages options
- Provide healthier food and beverage choices available in vending machines

- Provide nutrition information on sodium, calories, trans fats, or saturated fats for food and beverages sold in worksite cafeterias, snack bars, vending machines and other purchase points

Other recent CDC matte articles and resources on obesity:

Overweight and Obesity

<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

Obesity is common, serious, and costly

http://www.cdc.gov/media/matte/2012/05_weight_of_nation.pdf

Healthy Weight – It's Not a Diet, It's a Lifestyle

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/subtopic/matte/pdf/031210-Healthy-Weight.pdf>

Fit Physical Activity into Your Life, Your Way

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/subtopic/matte/pdf/CDCPhysicalActivityMatteRelease.pdf>

For additional information about the National Healthy Worksite Program, check out our [website](#) or email us at NationalHealthyWork@cdc.gov

###